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**Title:** Main fields of research on the problems of family violence in a local community

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**Citation style:** Jarosz Ewa. (2007). Main fields of research on the problems of family violence in a local community. "The New Educational Review" (2007, no. 3/4, s. 63-68).



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## Main Fields of Research on the Problems of Family Violence in a Local Community

### **Abstract**

The main goal of the presented article is to form basic aims of research on the problems of family violence in the local community. In order to do so, an analysis of various international and national documents has been made as they are sources of standards applicable to local research on family violence. Adopting the perspective of the social sector as an essential one to counteract the phenomenon, and at the same time, to carry out research on the problem, four basic aims of research were suggested by the author: establishing the picture of the problem of family violence, working out the context of its incidence, recognizing and monitoring the possibility to reduce it in a local environment and the assessment of the effectiveness of applied solutions, programmes and means.

**Key words:** *family violence, local community, prevention, local diagnosis*

### **Introduction**

The need to carry out research on the problems of family violence is nowadays highly emphasized or even regarded as compelling. First of all, it stems from some practical aspects such as an integral link between the effective counteraction of negative occurrences of family violence and their diagnosis. Thus, it is impossible to create an effective local system of preventing family violence without a multidimensional diagnosis of its local occurrence. Nevertheless, apart from practical and factual aspects, the need or even the necessity to carry out research on the problems of family violence is also formally specified in various documents both interna-

tional, such as the recommendations issued by the Council of Europe (e.g. R(90)2, (93)2, (2002) 5)<sup>1</sup> and the national ones (in Poland such as e.g. *Ustawa o przeciwdziałaniu przemocy w rodzinie* of 29<sup>th</sup> July 2005 [translator's note: *The Act on Counteracting Family Violence*] or *Krajowy Program Przeciwdziałania Przemocy w Rodzinie* [translator's note: *The National Programme for Counteracting Family Violence*] passed by the Polish government in September 2006).<sup>2</sup>

It can be easily observed that everybody notices the need to conduct research on the problems of family violence in order to prevent it from occurring, but at the same time there is neither a common agreement nor a mutual idea how to do it in an appropriate way. In other words, the widely perceived need to carry out such research is rarely accompanied by a clear concept of its implementation. Thus, there is a strong need for efficient models of local research on family violence, which could be applied to practical analysis of its occurrence and to organize counter actions in various local communities.

## **Main fields of research in the local diagnosis of the problem of family violence**

Basically, considering the problems of research on family violence in order to find a model that could be used for diagnoses in various local environments, first it is necessary to specify the basic fields of research i.e. *aims and tasks* of such diagnoses. Only on their basis can we define their research categories, i.e. issues which are to be analyzed and the type of data which ought to be gathered. In other words, this is the stage of working on *general and more detailed research indicators*. The next step covers choosing *a research strategy* and working out *a research workshop* (including a specification of the sources of data, the choice of research samples and research "objects", defining research techniques and tools, establishing the circumstances of carrying out the research, etc.). The logical sequence of all these stages is clear and stems from the general methodological rules in social and pedagogical sciences (cf. e.g. Pilch, Bauman 2001). It defines the researchers' conduct regardless of the analyzed phenomena and the level of analysis (macro or microsocial).

<sup>1</sup> The contents of the recommendations are presented on the website of the Council of Europe [www.coe.int/t/trnsversalprojects/children/keyLegalTexts](http://www.coe.int/t/trnsversalprojects/children/keyLegalTexts) (access 8.07.2006)

<sup>2</sup> The documents can be found on the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy [www.mps.gov.pl](http://www.mps.gov.pl) or on other websites of the Polish parliament or government.

In this study, it has been attempted to specify the aim of research on diagnoses and analyses of family violence occurring in the local environment by means of referring to and analyzing international and national standards, as well as to selected examples of local research – diagnoses of the occurrence of family violence.

The World Health Organization (WHO), which has clearly defined the issues of family violence and child abuse as a worldwide problem and their significance for individual and social welfare as catastrophic, has also pointed out the main tasks which ought to be carried out by means of proper collection and analysis of data on the problem of violence (Krug et al. 2002). The WHO mentions in this aspect the following: providing quantity data (incidence/scope of occurrence) of the phenomena, providing information on cases, causes, determinants and consequences of violence, identifying new trends in the problems of violence, providing suggestions on the priorities concerning prevention by means of identifying the areas of high risk of suffering from and using violence, spatial analysis of distribution of services helping victims of violence and providing information on the basis of which the applied means and actions could be assessed. (WHO, 2004, p. 11)

At the national level in Poland, we can also refer to some regulations and documents which contain some more or less specified guidance concerning the research on family violence. First of all, we can refer to the Act on Counteracting Family Violence [*Ustawa o przeciwdziałaniu przemocy w rodzinie*] of 29<sup>th</sup> July 2005. As far as the Act is concerned, a companion has been prepared which proves that the basis to create a system of counteracting family violence in the local environment is the research carried out in a few areas (*Przewodnik do realizacji ustawy o przeciwdziałaniu przemocy w rodzinie*, p. 68–69) such as establishing the scope of incidence, establishing the resources of the local environment i.e. the activity of various institutions offering help, working out a map of resources, finding out the attitude of the local community towards family violence and helping its victims as well as finding out the attitude and competence of professionals.

The scope of research on family violence which meets the global tendencies suggested by the WHO is presented in the National Programme for Counteracting Family Violence (which is sequential to the Act of 2005) adopted by the Polish government in September 2006. Specifying the actions in the scope of diagnosis of the problems of family violence, the National Programme points out the following (*National Programme...*, 2006): diagnosing the incidence of the problems of family violence with a division into different categories of victims, research on the existing infrastructure of institutions helping victims of family violence, the analysis of effectiveness of help provided to families suffering from family violence and research on needs for training offered to professionals dealing with this problem.

Whilst searching recommended fields of research on the problems of family violence occurring in the local environment, we should also pay our attention to examples of undertakings practically implemented in this aspect.

In the study *How to organize a local system of child abuse prevention* [in Polish: *Jak organizować lokalny system pomocy dzieciom krzywdzonym*] (2002) the basic elements of creating a local system in the area of Warsaw (district Praga-Południe) were presented. One of them consisted in working out a monograph of the area in the aspect of violence towards children. The monograph covered:

- general characteristics of the district,
- diagnosis of a current offer of institutions helping suffering children and their families,
- diagnosis of the scale of the child abuse problems in the district and
- diagnosis of the attitudes of professionals towards various aspects of the problem and actions taken.

In another example showing a local initiative of creating and improving the system of counteracting the family violence, the Institute of Health Psychology carried out research within the project *Family violence in the capital city – Warsaw* [in Polish: *Zjawisko przemocy domowej na terenie Miasta Stołecznego Warszawy*] in 2004. The research conducted covered two main fields: the diagnosis of the problem and the diagnosis of resources. The diagnosis of the problem analyzed the scale of the problem of family violence, its forms and social attitude towards family violence. The diagnosis of resources, on the other hand, identified the scope of institutional reactions (what institutions), their contents (what programmes) and professionals (competence and knowledge). Both fields of study – the diagnosis of the problem and resources were analyzed in correlation with each other (*Family violence ...*, 2004). In the quoted research, numerous examples of empirical analyses, i.e. general indicators were specified. They included:

- the scope of experience and violence used against a partner,
- the intensification and forms of violence used against children,
- the awareness of incidence of family violence in the area,
- determinants of family violence (demographic features, alcohol abuse, experiencing violence in childhood),
- spreading stereotypes on family violence,
- accepting family violence,
- readiness to seek help,
- experience of people working at institutions and services (professionals) with people suffering from family violence,
- self-assessment of preparation by professionals,
- professionals' needs at work,

- attitude of professionals towards family violence,
- types and number of institutions offering help,
- expertise of professionals, scope, form and accessibility of the institutions (*Zjawisko przemocy...*, 2004).

## **Main fields of local research on the problems of family violence – an attempt at synthesis**

On the basis of the presented global standards and examples of local diagnoses, we can attempt to define the basic aims and fields of local research on family violence. The main aim of such research is, let us not forget, creating, developing and improving a local system of counteracting family violence.

Summing up all the presented notes and analyses, in the submitted proposal defining the basic aims of research on family violence in a local environment, one can specify four main aims of research:

1. recognizing/defining/and monitoring the epidemiological picture and tendencies in the scope of the number of the problems of family violence in a local environment
2. defining the context for the incidence of family violence
3. recognizing and a systematic / monitoring analysis of the possibility to act in the local environment (institutions, centres, services, people and their actions)
4. establishing the effectiveness of actions (programmes, forms and means) based on empirical proofs in the most precise way possible.

The following diagram can be presented to show a model matrix of aims which ought to be carried out in the local diagnoses of the problem of family violence:

**Model matrix of the aims of local research on family violence**

Research on the problems of family violence in a local community			
Picture	Context	Possibilities	Effectiveness
Establishing what forms and types of family violence occur and prevail in a local community	Finding out spacial and social patterns and other features of incidence of family violence	The analysis of resources of all objects of actions: their competence and abilities as well as carried out actions, identification and analysis of features – protective factors in a local community	The assessment of individual programmes carried out by individuals as well as in a community, i.e. co-operational and integrated ones.

Using this model in the conditions of specific local communities will produce an array of general and more detailed questions. However, specifying particular aims of research is only the first and yet crucial element of conceptualization of local diagnoses. Other steps cover the selection of appropriate indicators, and the adoption of solutions in the scope of research procedure – i.e. selection of sources, determining research factors, working out tools. Each of these steps, however, requires a certain model on the basis of which the solutions used in a given local reality may be detailed or worked out. Such solutions and proposals should be presented in a more systematic and proved way, which requires another study.

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